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ABSTRACT

Scientific psychology did not begin with Fechner and Wundt in the 19th century; its roots actually stretch back to 18th century Germany. The only detailed account of this period was published by Max Dessoir more than 80 years ago. Dessoir identified some of the crucial figures in early psychology, including Wolff, Bonnet, Kruger, Hissman, and Mendelssohn. From 1783 to 1808, approximately 14 periodicals existed which dealt with psychology as we now conceive it. The earliest of these was the "Journal of Experiential Psychology." Seven journals dealt with a broad range of psychological topics, including applications to related fields such as education, linguistics, ethics, and psychopathology; five were devoted to physiological psychology and hypnotic phenomena; and two concentrated on characterology and psychotherapy. Three of the most important were the "Journal of Experiential Psychology," founded by Moritz; the "General Register for Empirical Psychology and Related Sciences," edited by Mauchert; and the "Psychological Journal," edited by Schmid. After 1808 these psychological journals became very rare, probably because of economic difficulties, a general disillusionment with empirical psychology, and the emergence of psychiatry as a medical specialty. (IS)

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HOW OLD IS SCIENTIFIC PSYCHOLOGY?

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (92nd, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August 24-28, 1984).

HOW OLD IS SCIENTIFIC PSYCHOLOGY?

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Present day historians of psychology have a curious misconception about their subject --- the belief that psychology as a sustained enterprise based on empirical investigation began in 19th century Germany with Fechner and Wundt. They are right about the country of origin but wrong about the century. The actual fact is that a vigorous empirical psychology flourished in Germany at the end of the 18th century, especially from 1783 to 1808. During this period approximately fourteen different psychological journals were published, although most of them lasted only one or two years. The first and most successful had a title which I translate: Journal of Experiential Psychology. All ten volumes of this magazine were reprinted in 1978 and are now available in many university libraries in Germany and the United States (6).

In this paper I shall try to do four things: first, indicate the general situation of German psychology around 1780; second, present an overview of the popular and technical journals which appeared during the next thirty years; third, describe in more detail three that I consider especially important and have personally examined; and, finally, suggest an explanation for the lack of new psychological journals after 1808.

I

The 18th century in Germany was a period of intense interest in psychology. Most of this development is unknown to contemporary psychologists; the only detailed account of it is the one published by Max Dessoir more than eighty years ago (4). The outstanding figure of the first half of the century was the philosopher Christian Wolff, who first made a systematic distinction between empirical psychology and rational psychology and published a volume on each. Dessoir describes the work of at least fifty different German and Swiss authors who published significant psychological contributions between the years 1730 and 1780. I shall mention only four whose writings were influential for the psychological journals at the end of the century.

This paper was presented at the 92nd annual convention of the American Psychological Association in Toronto on August 25, 1984.

The Swiss naturalist Charles Bonnet was successively an entomologist, a psychologist, and a metaphysician. He had a great influence in Germany, partly because of his advocacy of a physiological psychology, and partly because of his insistence on the independent existence and activity of the mind, or soul. (The German word "Seele," like the French word "âme," means both "mind" and "soul.")

Bonnet's physiological psychology was more speculative than empirically based. However in 1756 a German professor of medicine and philosophy, Johann Krüger, published a systematic, empirically based physiological psychology with the title Attempt at an Experimental Psychology (8). The organization of the book is based on Wolff's Empirical Psychology, but the contents draw on a great variety of sources, including many of the author's own observations.

The leading German advocate of British association psychology was the philosopher Michael Hissmann. His views were spread not only through his own books but also through a philosophical journal that he edited from 1778 through 1783. Unlike the vast majority of German writers on psychology Hissman was an extreme materialist and opponent of any doctrine of mental activity not completely reducible to physiological processes.

At the other end of the philosophical spectrum from Hissmann was the Jewish scholar and metaphysician Moses Mendelssohn (2). In his Letters on the Sentiments Mendelssohn emphasized the independence and importance of the feelings and developed what came to be known as the "three faculty" view of the mind --- the doctrine that all mental activities can be grouped under the headings of knowing, feeling, and willing.

Before closing this section I must mention one more German author who is not discussed by Dessoir --- Franz Anton Mesmer. Mesmer received his medical degree in Vienna in 1766, married a wealthy widow, and became a practising physician. In 1780 he was in Paris, performing remarkable cures, attracting some distinguished followers, and arousing the hostility of the French medical profession (5). The ups and downs of Mesmer's career

were followed by German scientists as well as French. A number of German physicians later became magnetists, and several periodicals were devoted to reports of their investigations.

II

The major source of information on German periodicals up to the year 1830 is a massive bibliography edited by Joachim Kirchner (7). It is naturally difficult to decide with these early journals just which ones should be called "psychological." Fortunately all authorities agree that the first was the Journal of Experiential Psychology founded in 1783 by Karl Philipp Moritz.

My best judgment is that there were fourteen periodicals which should be classified as psychological according to our understanding of that term today. They may be conveniently divided into three broad groups. Seven journals dealt with a broad variety of psychological topics, including applications to related fields such as education, linguistics, ethics, and psychopathology; five were devoted to physiological psychology and hypnotic phenomena; and two concentrated on characterology and psychotherapy.

The general psychological journals span a period of 22 years, from 1783 through 1804. The first was edited successively by three men, none of whom held a university appointment. After this however, most of the general journals were edited by university professors of philosophy.

The five journals in the second group divide into two with a general orientation to physiological psychology and three specializing in reports of somnambulistic and hypnotic phenomena. These journals span an even longer period of time, from 1784 through 1808.

The two journals in the last group were widely separated in time. The first was published in 1788 and 1789 and edited by Karl Pockels, who had been left in charge of the Journal of Experiential Psychology for two years while Moritz was in Italy. Pockels' own journal bore the title: Contributions to the Advancement of Characterology, especially with Reference to our Moral Nature. The other periodical in the third group was

called the Journal of Psychotherapy and appeared in three volumes in 1805 and 1806. It was edited by a very distinguished professor of medicine and neuroanatomy, Johann Reil, and a professor of philosophy, Carl Kayssler.

III

Karl Philipp Moritz was only 27 years old when he launched his journal, but he was already a well-known literary figure in Berlin. He became even better known during the remaining ten years of his life, partly through the journal, but even more through his writings on aesthetics and his two autobiographical novels Anton Reiser and Andreas Hartknopf. A full-scale biography of Moritz was published in 1979 (3).

Moritz had had a very unhappy childhood and a troubled youth, marked by distressing inner conflicts and many changes of direction. He kept a diary, and by the time he was 25 had attained a moderate degree of mental stability through the support of his friends, his increasing financial security, and his practice of systematic self analysis. His journal had a remarkable title, which I translate in full as follows:

Know Thyself
or
Journal of Experiential Psychology
as a
Reader for the Learned and Unlearned
Edited with the Support of several Friends of the Truth
by
Karl Philipp Moritz

Moritz had actually spent a great deal of time with his friends in planning the journal. The planning group included Moses Mendelssohn, the two editors of the Berlin Monthly, and a distinguished physician, physiologist, and philosopher, Marcus Herz. The major goal of the publication was the promotion of mental hygiene through accurate psychological observation and reporting. A secondary goal was the advancement of knowledge through the careful study of development, especially the development of language, and through observation and reporting on all sorts of interesting topics such as childhood memories, indicators of character, dreams, premonitions, somnambulism, etc.

In actual practice about half the contributions to the journal were case histories, and a majority of these dealt with

psychopathology of the most varied sort. Many of the case histories were autobiographical, including one by Marcus Herz and several excerpts from Moritz's Anton Reiser. Moritz was well aware of the problems of self-deception, and published a rather penetrating article on this subject.

A unique feature of this first psychological journal was the strong encouragement for readers to contribute case histories. These came from teachers, lawyers, judges, physicians, and clergymen, and they varied a good deal in the quality of reporting. Many were quite sensational and probably helped to build circulation.

A more scholarly psychological journal was the General Register for Empirical Psychology and Related Sciences edited from 1792 to 1793 and from 1798 to 1801 by Immanuel David Mauchart (1). Mauchart was an almost unknown educator in Tübingen at the time he began his publication. He was a great admirer of Moritz, and had contributed to Moritz's magazine. It is evident from his preface to the first volume as well as his other writings that Mauchart was a far more systematic thinker than Moritz.

Mauchart's journal published general contributions to empirical psychology and applications of psychology to ethics, education, and aesthetics. There were case histories, but not in as high a proportion as in the Journal of Experiential Psychology. The first three volumes also contained scholarly reviews of books published in the area of psychology, broadly defined.

Mauchart was quite interested in the clarification of terminology. The General Register aimed at generalizations and systematic positions as well as the presentation of raw materials. And there was a much clearer distinction than in Moritz's journal between the role of author and the role of reader.

Karl Christian Erhard Schmid edited a Psychological Journal from 1796 through 1799 (9). He was professor of philosophy at the University of Jena and had published a lengthy treatise on empirical psychology in 1791. Schmid's Psychological Journal is scientifically more ambitious than those of Moritz or Mauchart, but it is less sophisticated in methodology.

Schmid believed that the raw materials for a scientific empirical psychology had now been assembled. He said that the major goal of his journal would be "to order the already available materials under general concepts, and to formulate natural laws of the greatest possible generality, definiteness, systematic interconnectedness, and obvious certainty." He was clearly hoping for a science something like physics.

Four years after the end of his Psychological Journal Schmid tried his hand at an Anthropological Journal, which lasted only two years. The new terminology reflects Kant's view that human characteristics can be systematically studied, though psychology can never become a quantitative natural science. A major feature of this journal was articles on characteristics of particular national, racial, and social groups.

IV

After 1808 these psychological journals become very rare. Several factors seem to have weakened their position. One was certainly economic difficulties. The editors of the reprinted edition of Moritz's journal estimate that a periodical of this sort would have needed about 800 paid subscriptions to be profitable. The fact that it was continued for such a long time and came out so regularly suggests that it at least broke even in most years. By contrast Mauchart's journal never attained anything like this circulation. When he resumed publication in 1798, after a five year lapse, he listed all the subscribers to his journal. There were only 80! Nearly half were clergymen. Fourteen were students. Only five professors were listed among the subscribers, and one physician. The situation was probably similar for the other psychological journals of the later period.

It is also likely that some disillusionment with empirical psychology set in after 1800. Certainly psychology was not producing natural laws with the same generality, definiteness, and certainty as those found in the physical sciences. And the journals devoted to hypnotic phenomena encountered a much worse problem: The case history approach, on which they mainly relied, could not resolve the continuing controversy over the genuineness of the phenomena reported. The whole field became scientifically suspect.

An additional factor in the decline of the psychological journals was the emergence of psychiatry as a distinct medical specialty. One of the German leaders in the movement toward a scientific psychiatry was Johann Reil, whose Journal of Psychotherapy is usually considered the first German psychiatric journal. The problems of psychopathology with which the Journal of Experiential Psychology had been so much concerned were from this time on viewed as primarily medical problems.

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